

# **U. S. Tuna Tracking and Verification Plan**

## **Overview**

- To ensure that the "dolphin-safe" label is accurate for tuna purchased by the public, NOAA Fisheries has developed a plan for tracking and verifying the dolphin-safe condition of tuna caught in the eastern tropical Pacific Ocean (ETP). The tracking system is based on keeping dolphin-safe tuna separated from non-dolphin-safe tuna from capture through processing.

## **Fishing Operations**

- NOAA Fisheries regulations require that dolphin-safe tuna be stored in designated dolphin-safe storage wells aboard purse seine fishing vessels, and that non-dolphin-safe tuna be stored only in designated non-dolphin-safe storage wells. Storage well numbers are used to identify dolphin-safe and non-dolphin-safe tuna throughout unloading, transshipping, weighing in, storage, and canning at processing plants.
- Every purse seine tuna vessel greater than 400 short tons carrying capacity that harvests yellowfin tuna in the ETP must have an Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) approved observer onboard to oversee every fishing trip. In addition to other duties, the observer records certain information on a Tuna Tracking Form (TTF) each time the purse seine net is set on a school of tuna. The information recorded after each set includes: 1) date and time of the set; 2) tuna species; 3) estimated weight by species; 4) identifying number of the well in which the tuna are stored. All dolphin-safe sets are recorded on a dolphin-safe TTF, and all sets in which any dolphin was killed or seriously injured are recorded on a separate, non-dolphin-safe TTF. The IATTC observer and the fishing vessel's chief engineer review and initial the information recorded for every set of the net. At the end of the trip, the observer and the vessel captain sign completed TTFs certifying that they are complete and accurate to the best of their knowledge.
- NOAA Fisheries is notified of the location and expected time of arrival of all U.S. vessels completing fishing trips in the ETP. A NOAA Fisheries representative meets the vessel at the dock to oversee offloading if previously received radio reports from the observer confirm that there are any non-dolphin safe tuna onboard. If the catch is dolphin-safe, the vessel may or may not be met. The vessel

owner or management is responsible for sending the completed TTFs NOAA Fisheries Tuna Tracking and Verification Program office. Upon receipt and review of the TTFs, a dolphin-safe certificate that is supplied to foreign as well as domestic canners may be provided to the vessel owner/management on request.

### **Processor Reports**

- U.S. tuna processors are required to submit monthly reports to NOAA Fisheries detailing the source, species, weight, and dolphin-safe status of all tuna received at U.S. processing facilities. For any tuna harvested in the ETP, additional reports are required to assist NOAA Fisheries in tracking that tuna throughout the canning process.

### **Tracking Imports**

- To track the dolphin-safe status of tuna imports, all tuna products except fresh tuna imported or sold in the United States must be accompanied by a properly certified Fisheries Certificate of Origin (NOAA Form 370). In some cases, an additional certification sign representative of a nation participating in the International Dolphin Conservation Program is required to document the dolphin-safe status of the shipment.

### **Dolphin-Safe Verification**

- Verification procedures for all required information submissions are included in the NOAA Fisheries tuna tracking regulations. The United States may verify fishing reports by the use of IATTC data and vessel processor or importer reports by reviewing company records. Routine follow-up of NOAA Form 370 documents is conducted on an as-needed basis. Random purchases of canned tuna in various locations around the country are made, and the product is traced back through processing and ultimately to the harvesting vessel to verify the dolphin-safe condition of the tuna. As of September 2003, spot checks have been carried out for tuna products randomly purchased in 30 states and territories.